

Identifying a Dental Support Partner

Objective

To identify and use a support partner to help you manage your dental phobia.

You Should Know

Managing your dental phobia can be challenging and overwhelming, especially if you are dealing with it on your own. A trustworthy support partner can provide encouragement and advocacy during distressing moments in your dental treatment, or as you take important steps to obtain dental care. A support partner can help reduce your fear and anxiety, while providing an outlet for you to express your needs and concerns in a safe and nonjudgmental environment.

What You Should Do

Identifying a person you trust is the critical first step in finding a support partner. This should be someone you can depend on in times of dental distress, with whom you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. You may also benefit from having your support person accompany you to dental appointments. If this is an important factor, consider the flexibility and availability that person may have in her/his schedule, including other obligations or priorities.

Write down the name and contact information of at least one family member or friend you think would be a good support partner.

What characteristics does that person(s) have that make him/her a good candidate for your support partner, including availability and accessibility?

The next step is to ask that person or persons to serve as your support partner. You may decide to ask one person to be available to talk to you when you are feeling anxious, and a different person to attend dental appointments with you. You may also find it helpful for your support

partner to keep you accountable in scheduling and keeping follow-up dental appointments, or when setting goals around your dental care.

Here are suggested talking points you can use when making this request, or you can create your own. You can print out your talking points and hand it to your identified support partner, email it to them, or read it to them.

- I have dental phobia, which means that I find it extremely frightening and anxiety-producing to go to the dentist and get the treatment I need.
- I often experience [symptoms] before going to an appointment or during an appointment **OR** I have not been to the dentist in [X] years because of my fear and/or past negative experiences.
- Because I trust you and value your support in my life, I would like you to be my dental support partner [or other title you like].
- As a dental support partner, I would like you to provide support and encouragement to me [before/during/after] a dental appointment or procedure. This means [talking to me on the phone when I am feeling anxious or nervous before an appointment, accompanying me to dental appointments, reminding me of my next appointment or follow-up steps, and/or _____.]

- Other ways that you can support me:

- Other details I would like you to know:

- Do you have any questions for me? What else would be helpful for you to know?

Once you have a dental support partner in place, it would be helpful to discuss the boundaries of your relationship and expectations you have for each other, as well as concerns that either of you may have.

What are some additional talking points or concerns you might want to discuss with your support partner?

What are some talking points or concerns that you think your support partner might raise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How can a support partner help you manage your dental phobia?

What role can your support partner play in improving your dental care and health?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
